



News Release

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Flu activity increasing in Washington; vaccination gives best protection

Three Puget Sound area people, a child and two adults, are the *first reported deaths this season*

OLYMPIA — Flu activity is picking up across our state and the nation. Influenza can be serious and tragically, a Pierce County child is the first reported person in the state whose death has been linked to the flu this season. The flu-related deaths of two King County adults were also reported within the past two weeks.

“Any death from a preventable illness is upsetting, and it’s especially heartbreaking when a child dies,” says Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “These deaths are a somber reminder that flu is serious and makes thousands sick in our state each year. With flu season picking up, it’s important to remember that we can protect ourselves and our loved ones with a flu shot.”

Laboratory-confirmed flu deaths are reportable in Washington, though many flu-related deaths may go unreported because they’re not lab-confirmed or tested for influenza. The Pierce County child was a boy under 12 years old. In King County, a man in his 80s and a woman in her 70s were lab-confirmed as flu deaths earlier this month.

Flu can cause serious illness even in healthy people. Everyone six months and older should get a flu shot each year. Flu shots are especially important for people at high risk for complications from the flu, including young kids, people 65 and older, pregnant women and women who recently gave birth, and people with certain medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, and neurologic conditions.

It takes about two weeks after being vaccinated to be fully protected. Children under nine may need two doses of flu vaccine about four weeks apart for protection. This year’s vaccine is well-matched to the strains that are spreading.

Flu seasons are unpredictable and can be severe. In the United States over a recent 30-year period, the flu was linked to thousands of deaths each year — ranging from 3,000 to 49,000.

Flu viruses spread when people with flu generate droplets from their mouths or noses while coughing, sneezing, or talking. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. People can also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or nose. A person can spread flu before they know they're sick and up to seven days after. Children can spread it for even longer. The best way to avoid getting or spreading the flu is to get a yearly flu shot, wash your hands, cover your cough, and stay home if you're sick.

If you're already sick with the flu, antiviral medications can lessen symptoms and help prevent serious complications. They work best when started quickly; people should ask their health care provider about their best option. It's also important to stay away from others for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.

Information on where to find immunizations is available through health care providers, local health agencies, the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588, and the [online flu vaccine finder](#).

Visit our [Flu News website](#) on the Department of Health's website (www.doh.wa.gov) for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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